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ABSTRACT

This paper shows how the heuristics (organized questioning techniques) of contemporary literary criticism in the United States can be used to teach composition. Contemporary criticism emphasizes that literature should be viewed as a process of communication, not as a mere artifact or product of discourse. Teachers can apply this view of literature to instruction by showing students the choices they make as they move through the composition process. The heuristics that the students use would then reflect an interaction between the intentions of the author and the response of the audience. (RL)

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Literary Criticism and Composition Theory: Heuristics and Models for Teaching Writing

Are Rhetoric and Poetics separate and discrete fields of study? Although rhetorical theorists from Aristotle to Burke have pointed out the overlap between these two areas, detailed discussion has centered on showing their distinctiveness.[1] The common ground of Rhetoric and Poetics has been a "no man's land, the limbo of the faithless, for no self-respecting esthetician will vulgarize his subject by glancing, even momentarily, at rhetoric, and the rhetorician, though generally much more comprehensive in his viewpoint than the esthetician, is so busied with the 'practical' discourses of history (both past and present) that he seldom has time to concern himself with poetry."[2] Extended entry into this no man's land is long overdue. This is especially true at a time when English departments are becoming more aware of their dual responsibility to teach composition and promote literary study. A sharp distinction between rhetoric and poetics has encouraged us to view these duties as two separate functions. Actually, the study of literature and the teaching of writing are closely related and mutually illuminating. In fact, recent trends in literary criticism suggest that a rapprochement may be taking place

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between literary and composition theory; shared paradigms are now emerging. What I would like to do in this essay is to outline these areas of shared theory and practice.

Observation and interpretation always proceed within accepted paradigms, whether in medical research, composition study, or literary criticism.[3] From the late thirties to the early sixties, the dominant paradigm in American criticism was New Critical formalism. As we are all well-aware, this "objective" criticism (in its purest form, at least) viewed a literary work as an artifact, cut off from authorial intention and reader response. It rejected "external" criticism and restricted its analysis to the work in and of itself. Many New Critics spacialized the text, viewing its parts in relation to the whole, a tightly organized network of structures.[4] This American New Criticism provided little of interest to rhetoricians. It not only ignored the audience (a central concern of rhetoric); it also actively discouraged talk about readers through its condemnation of the "affective fallacy."

In recent years a reaction against New Criticism has set in. The model of art as aesthetic product is being challenged by a model of art as communicative process. Both the intentional fallacy and the affective fallacy are being practiced with impunity. This new paradigm of criticism has much more to offer the composition teacher, and it is here that we can begin to see the overlap of rhetoric and poetics most clearly. Two recent critical approaches that work within the model of literature as communication are textual-biographical and reader-response criticisms.

Recent textual-biographical critics view art as process not as product. This may at first seem contradictory to our usual notion that textual editors are only interested in establishing a product, the intended text for a critical edition. But this portrayal is incomplete. As G. Thomas Tanselle points out, the editor establishes his text based on the "author's final intention," and this criteria must be viewed in terms of the textualist's knowledge of the author's whole composing process.[5] That is, the literary work must be seen as a process, a series of acts by the author. Furthermore, when a critic studies a work from this textual-biographical perspective, he revels in the intentional fallacy, bringing to bear his total knowledge of the author's composing process (including extant forms of the text) and the relevant biographical events that affect that process.[6]

From a complementary perspective, recent reader-oriented critics have also viewed art as communicative process. As M.H. Abrams puts it: "Since the late 1950's . . . there has been a strong revival of interest in literature as a public act involving communication between author and reader, and this has led to the development of a rhetorical criticism which, without departing from a primary focus on the work as such, undertakes to analyze those elements within a poem or a prose narrative which are there primarily for the reader's sake."[7] Abrams cites the work of Wayne Booth in his Rhetoric of Fiction (1961) as an example of this type of criticism. In the late sixties and early seventies,

this rhetorical approach has been extended (and transformed) by reader-response critics such as Wolfgang Iser in phenomenology, Jonathan Culler through his theory of reading conventions, Richard Ohmann with speech act theory, and the early Stanley Fish in his affective stylistics.[8] Whereas the textual-biographical critics view literature as a series of acts by the author, these reader-response critics view it as a series of acts by the reader. Fish's criticism, for example, is "an analysis of the developing responses of the reader in relation to the words as they succeed one another in time" ("Literature in the Reader," pp. 126-27). The reader's response includes "the making and revising of assumptions, the rendering and regretting of judgments, the coming to and abandoning of conclusions, the giving and withdrawing of approval, the specifying of causes, the asking of questions, the supplying of answers, the solving of puzzles" ("Interpreting the Variorum, p. 474). Iser describes a similar process of "anticipation and retrospection" in reading: "We look forward, we look back, we decide, we change our decisions, we form expectations, we are shocked by their nonfulfillment, we question, we muse, we accept, we reject; this is the dynamic process of recreation" ("The Reading Process," pp. 287, 293).

Textual-biographical and reader-response approaches are not only complementary, they are interpenetrating. Since they share the model of literature as communicative act, it is not surprising to find textualists referring to readers as well as authors, and reader-oriented critics discussing authorial intention as well as reader response.[9] For example, in "Sober

Second Thoughts: The 'Author's Final Version' of Fitzgerald's Tender Is the Night," Brian Higgins and Hershel Parker compare the 1934 version of Tender with the 1951 Cowley edition, which rearranged major sections of the book with only the slightest rewriting. These textualists criticize Malcolm Cowley for following the highly suspect directions left by Fitzgerald, and they argue that "as far as aesthetics went, Cowley barely asked such superficial critical questions as the effect of moving a particular scene about, much less more profound questions about how any literary work is constructed and how any piece of literature affects its readers." Higgins and Parker claim that, by the time Fitzgerald got to Book II, "almost every detail of what he chose to write was to some extent a consequence of what he had already written and was designed to cause certain effects in the mind of the reader who had already read certain scenes." Thus, when a large section of the original Book II was placed at the beginning of the 1951 text with only minimal revisions, this reordering "caused great damage, in the long run, to all parts of the novel," resulting in much violent and unintended restructuring of the "reader's response." [10]

While textualists begin talking about the "reader's response," some reader-oriented critics have already incorporated into their theories a notion of "authorial intention." In his description of the "optimal reader," Stanley Fish admits he could just as well be talking about the "intended reader." In Fish's view, "the efforts of readers are always efforts to discern

and therefore to realize (in the sense of becoming) an author's intention." Fish's reader-response criticism focuses on "the succession of acts readers perform in the continuing assumption that they are dealing with intentional beings. In this view discerning intention is no more or less than understanding, and understanding includes (is constituted by) all the activities which make up . . . the structure of the reader's experience" ("Interpreting the Variorum," pp. 475-76). From a similar reader-oriented perspective (a theory of reading conventions), Jonathan Culler also provides a place within his theory for authorial intention. Put simply, an author can write "only within the context of a system of enabling conventions which constitute and delimit the varieties of discourse. To intend a meaning is to postulate reactions of an imagined reader who has assimilated the relevant conventions" (Structuralist Poetics, p. 16).

We can now look schematically at these recent reactions against American New Criticism:

	AMERICAN NEW CRITICISM:	
intentional fallacy	literature as aesthetic object (product) viewed spacially	affective fallacy
	RECENT CRITICISM:	
Textual-Biographical Criticism	literature as act of communication (process) viewed temporally	Reader-Response Criticism

Whereas the old New Critical paradigm was hostile to any synthesis of rhetoric and poetics, the new paradigm which views literature as a temporal act of communication provides much encouragement for a rapprochement between literary criticism and composition theory. Like textual-biographical critics, composition theorists stress the importance of viewing the composing process as a series of acts by the writer.[11] And like reader-response critics, these rhetoricians suggest paying considerable attention to the reader while writing and analyzing discourse.[12]

A simple view of the composing process based on the traditional rhetorical categories--invention, arrangement, and style--will further illustrate the fit between composition theory and recent literary criticism (primarily reader-response approaches). In what follows I will oversimplify the composing process and fall into such heresies as implying a form-content split. My point, however, is simply to provide a clear framework in which to examine some additional parallels between literary criticism and composition.[13]

The goal of the composition teacher is to give the student writer alternative <u>choices</u> at every stage of the composing process. For example, in the area of invention (the generation of subject matter), the student has at least two alternatives: brainstorming and heuristics. Brainstorming is an unsystematic way of asking questions about a topic, while heuristics are systematic ways ways of asking questions (see Winterowd, <u>Contemporary Writer</u>,

p. 82). Literary critics often use heuristics in their analysis of literary texts. Fish's heuristic "is simply the rigorous and disinterested asking of the question, what does this word, phrase, sentence, paragraph, chapter, novel, play, poem do?" ("Literature in the Reader," p. 126). This question can be used by the student writer to generate comments about any piece of discourse (including his own). Kenneth Burke's Pentad is an even more powerful heuristic. Students can easily use its terms--act, agent, agency, scene, and purpose--to generate questions about any human action.[14] Clearly, then, literary criticism can provide resources for the composition teacher at the stage of invention.

Once subject matter is generated, what choices of form are available to the student? Again, literary theory provides some useful models for the composition teacher. To Burke, form is "the psychology of the audience"; it is "an arousing and fulfillment of desires. A work has form in so far as one part of it leads a reader to anticipate another part, to be gratified by the sequence."[15] In its emphasis on the reader and temporal sequence, Fish's "structure of the reader's experience" is similar to Burke's theory of form. In describing the structure of response, Fish specifies what the reader "is doing, what assumptions he is making, what conclusions he is reaching, what expectations he is forming, what attitudes he is entertaining, in short, what acts he is being moved to perform."[16] At the level of arrangement, then, the work of Fish and Burke encourages the composition teacher to place a strong emphasis on the structure of the reader's response.

The level of style provides another area where literary and composition theory interact. Again, the notion of choice can serve as our central concept: what sentence structures are available to the student writer? Though not exhaustive, the following outline organizes much of the recent work in stylistics (and supplies typical examples of each stylistic perspective):[17]

STYLE AS CHOICE:

I. Pedagogical Stylistics
   A. Cumulative sentence--Christensen
   B. Sentence-Combining--Mellon, O'Hare

II. Aesthetic Stylistics
   A. Classical Dualism
      1. Norm/deviation
         a. Quantitative (deviation in frequency of occurence)--Milic
         b. Qualitative ("ungrammaticalness")
            (1) Syntagmatic (deviations from a norm in the text)--Riffaterre's stylistic context and devices
            (2) Paradigmatic (deviations from a norm not restricted to a single text)
                Mukařovský's foregrounding
                Neo-Firthian context of situation (register and dialect)
      2. Recurrence or convergence of textual pattern--
         Jakobson's "The poetic function projects the principle of equivalence from the axis of selection into the axis of combination."
         Halliday's cohesion
         Levin's coupling
      3. Exploitation of a grammar of possibilities--
         Ohmann's "a <u>way</u> of saying <u>it</u>":
           use of transformational-generative grammar(deep and surface structure)
           use of speech act theory (locutionary and illocutionary acts)
   B. Monism
      1. Expressive
         a. Psychological--Holland's 'style is identity' (ego choices)
         b. Organic--Wimsatt's 'style is meaning' (choice of meaning)
      2. Structural--Barthes' 'meaning is style (code)' (choice of code)
      3. Affective--Fish's structure of the reader's experience (choice of strategy)

I will focus on only two categories of stylistics outlined above: pedagogical and aesthetic. When we view style as choice, pedagogical stylistics becomes a matter of providing students with syntactic

alternatives. Aesthetic stylistics, on the other hand, becomes a method of analyzing a text in terms of alternative choices among available structures. Empirical studies have shown that pedagogical stylistics can improve a student's syntactic fluency.[18] No such strong claims are made for aesthetic stylistics. However, some aspects of aesthetic stylistics do have contributions to make to composition.

Take the following example from one of the most informed composition texts now available:

> As we shall see, a major problem in student writing is the tendency not to put separate ideas together via the syntactic devices of the language. Here is a beginning paragraph from a freshman essay:
>
> 71 My greatest love is the love of my possessions. I feel like a king when I am amongst my possessions. But my possessions are not material possessions such as a beautiful new automobile or an enormous new house. Rather, my possessions are the wonders of nature: the beautiful, snow-capped mountains and the deep, crystal-clear lakes.

I think most readers would say that 71 is either immature or awkward or both. One alternative to it is the following:

> 72 I feel like a king when I am amongst the wonders of nature, for they are my greatest love and my greatest possessions: snow-capped mountains and deep, crystal-clear lakes rather than material things such as a new automobile or an enormous

house.

> I would argue that 72 sounds more mature, perhaps even more intelligent, than 71, and yet the idea content of both of them is essentially the same. (Winterowd, Contemporary Writer, pp. 308-09)

Professor Winterowd's purpose here is to illustrate the usefulness of pedagogical stylistics (in this case, embedding propositions within propositions). As he argues further: "The reason that most readers would prefer 72 over 71 is simply that in 72 the grammatical possibilities of the language have been used to put closely related ideas together in the neat syntactic package of a sentence."

However, by focusing on the syntactic choices, Professor Winterowd ignores larger rhetorical strategies. If we examine 71 and 72 from the perspective of affective stylistics, we see that the structure of the reader's experience is radically different in each case. Though 71 may sound syntactically "immature," it is certainly more rhetorically "sophisticated" than 72. In 71 the freshman writer (consciously or not) has withheld the specific name of his "greatest love." After the first sentence, the reader naturally jumps to the conclusion that "possessions" refer to material things. The second sentence offers nothing to contradict such a conclusion: it suggests the image of a king in his treasure room. (I distinctly remember my impression at this point during my first reading: not only does this student lack syntactic fluency, but more importantly his values are clearly superficial and undeveloped.) The contrastive but begins the rhetorical reversal. The third sentence contradicts the reader's previous conclusion:

the writer's greatest love is not material possessions. The final sentence not only provides a new equation (possessions= nature), but it also forces the reader to repudiate his previous condescending attitude toward the writer's value system. Such a reversal makes a rather commonplace statement into a rhetorically forceful corrective. In Professor Winterowd's "more mature" rewrite of 71, none of these rhetorical strategies is manifested: because no information is withheld, the reader jumps to no false conclusions and makes no mistaken judgments about the writer. Does 72 have more embedded propositions than 71? Yes. Is it more rhetorically sophisticated? No.

I've used this example to show how aesthetic stylistics can give composition teachers an added perspective in using pedagogical stylistics. Once again recent literary theory sheds light on composition theory.

In terms of their controlling paradigms and in light of shared models for invention, arrangement and style, rhetoric and poetics are becoming more closely related in current theory and practice. This statement implies a theoretical justification for a historical point I made at the beginning of this essay: literary criticism and composition theory can be parts of one homogeneous discipline of English. Indeed, literature specialists have the potential to be the best qualified teachers of composition. But I would like to stress a further point: not just any English professor can teach writing, even if he has accepted the model

of literature as communicative act. It is clear that composition teachers are becoming specialists within the English Department (not just second-class citizens). There is now a growing empirical and rhetorical body of knowledge that all serious teachers of composition must master.[19] Nevertheless, as I have tried to show, composition and literary study need not be antithetical functions within our discipline. A synthesis of rhetoric and poetics will go a long way toward curing the English Department's split personality.

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Notes

[1] For a recent discussion of the poetics-rhetoric distinction, see the "Colloquy" between Kenneth Burke and Wilbur Samuel Howell in Quarterly Journal of Speech, 62 (February 1976), 62-77.

[2] W. Ross Winterowd, "Beyond Style," Philosophy and Rhetoric, 5 (Spring 1972), 110. My enormous debt to Professor Winterowd's insights in composition theory will be evident from my many citations of his work.

[3] I am using the term "paradigm" in the sense used by Thomas S. Kuhn in his oft-cited treatise The Structure of Scientific Revolutions (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1962; 2nd ed. 1970): paradigms are "accepted examples" of actual practice--"examples which include law, theory, application, and instrumentation together"--shared examples "from which spring particular coherent traditions" of discussion and research (p. 10). A paradigm suggests "a time-tested and group-licensed way of seeing" (p. 189), a perspective on all or part of reality, and it provides models to organize and communicate that perspective. Though not distinguishing between "paradigm" and "model" as I have here (and as Kuhn does in his "Postscript--1969," p. 184), David Bleich provides a related discussion of paradigms in "The Subjective Paradigm in Science, Psychology, and Criticism," New Literary History, 7 (Winter 1976), 313-34.

[4] For recent critiques of New Critical formalism, see Richard Strier, "The Poetics of Surrender: An Exposition and Critique of New Critical Poetics," Critical Inquiry, 2 (Autumn 1975), 171-89; Richard Ohmann, "Literature as Act," in Approaches to Poetics, ed. Seymour Chatman (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1973), pp. 95-96; and Stanley E. Fish, "Interpreting the Variorum," Critical Inquiry, 2 (Spring 1976), 468-70, 473-74.

[5] G. Thomas Tanselle, "The Editorial Problem of Final Authorial Intention," Studies in Bibliography, 29 (1976), 183, 193, 195.

[6] For an example of this approach, see "Why Pierre Went Wrong," Studies in the Novel, 8 (Spring 1976), 7-23, where Hershel Parker describes the biographical events that caused Melville to change his intention after more than half the book had been written. See also Parker's review of the Facsimile and Virginia Editions of The Red Badge

of Courage in Nineteenth-Century Fiction, 30 (March 1976), 561-62, where Parker suggests the interpretive significance of external pressure on Crane to make large-scale late excisions; Henry Binder presents an exhaustive discussion of this textual argument in his "The Red Badge of Courage Nobody Knows," Studies in the Novel, 9 (Summer 1977).

[7] M.H. Abrams, A Glossary of Literary Terms (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1957; 3rd ed. 1971), p. 148.

[8] For brief introductions to these four critics, see Wolfgang Iser, "The Reading Process: A Phenomenological Approach," New Literary History, 3 (Winter 1972), 279-99; Jonathan Culler, Structuralist Poetics (Ithica: Cornell Univ. Press, 1975), pp. 113-238; Richard Ohmann, "Literature as Act," pp. 81-107; Stanley E. Fish, "Literature in the Reader: Affective Stylistics," New Literary History, 2 (Autumn 1970), 123-62. See also Steven Mailloux, "Reader-Response Criticism?" Genre, 10 (Fall 1977), 413-31.

[9] Nor is it coincidental that both discuss speech act theory, which views discourse as constituted by shared conventions of speakers and hearers. Compare Tanselle, "Final Authorial Intention," pp. 173-74, 179, with Ohmann's pioneering work (e.g.,"Speech Acts and the Definition of Literature," Philosophy and Rhetoric, 4 [1971], 1-19) and more recent discussions by Iser ("The Reality of Fiction: A Functionalist Approach to Literature," New Literary History, 7 [Autumn 1975], 7-38) and Fish ("How To Do Things with Austin and Searle: Speech Act Theory and Literary Criticism," MLN, 91 [October 1976], 983-1025).

[10] Brian Higgins and Hershel Parker, "Sober Second Thoughts: The 'Author's Final Version' of Fitzgerald's Tender Is the Night," Proof, 4 (1975), 129-52; the quotations in this paragraph are from pp. 136, 139, 152, and 140.

[11] See, for example, Janet Emig, The Composing Process of Twelfth Graders (Urbana: NCTE, 1971).

[12] See, for example, W. Ross Winterowd, The Contemporary Writer (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1975), p. 30, and William F. Irmscher, The Holt Guide to English, 2nd ed. (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1976), pp. 172 ff.

[13] Recent rhetorical theorists have used this same classical framework to organize their discussions of composition: see W. Ross Winterowd, Contemporary Rhetoric: A Conceptual Background with Readings (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1975), and Frank J. D'Angelo, A Conceptual Theory of Rhetoric (Cambridge: Winthrop Pub., 1975).

[14] See Winterowd, Contemporary Writer, pp. 82-90, and Irmscher, Holt Guide, pp. 30-40. It might be objected that Burke is not part of recent developments in literary criticism. After all, he has been writing important criticism since the thirties. However, as significant as his critical theory may have been, Burke was a lonely voice in those days, crying "in the New Critical Wilderness" (as Earl Miner has recently put it in a review of Fish's Self-Consuming Artifacts, JEGP, 72 [October 1973], 542). But while New Critical poetics has died its slow death, Burke's work has been 'rediscovered' by literary theorists. "Burke's critical method . . . seems to be coming openly into its own during the current disenchantment with Ransom's critical legacy" (Warwick Wadlington, The Confidence Game in American Literature [Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1975], p. 24 -- see also Wayne C. Booth, "Kenneth Burke's Way of Knowing," Critical Inquiry, 1 [September 1974], 1-22, and his Modern Dogma and the Rhetoric of Assent [Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1974], especially pp. 167-77). It is from this perspective that I see Burke as a part of recent trends in literary criticism.

[15] Kenneth Burke, Counter-Statement (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1931; 2nd ed. 1953), pp. 31, 124. See Winterowd, Contemporary Rhetoric, p. 183.

[16] Stanley E. Fish, "What Is Stylistics and Why Are They Saying Such Terrible Things About It?" in Approaches to Poetics, p. 144.

[17] To construct this outline I have modified and combined the categorizations found in Winterowd, Contemporary Rhetoric, p. 253; Louis Milic, "Theories of Style and their Implications for the Teaching of Composition," CCC, 16 (May 1965), 67; Donald C. Freeman, "Linguistic Approaches to Literature," Linguistics and Literary Style, ed. Donald C. Freeman (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1970), pp. 3-17; and Tzvetan Todorov, "The Place of Style in the Structure

of the Text," Literary Style: A Symposium, ed. Seymour Chatman (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1971), p. 31. Space prohibits a full discussion of each stylistic perspective outlined here, but see Edward P. J. Corbett, "Approaches to the Study of Style," Teaching Composition: 10 Bibliographical Essays, ed. Gary Tate (Fort Worth: Texas Christian Univ. Press, 1976), pp. 73-109, and for an interesting critique of aesthetic stylistics, see Fish, "What Is Stylistics?" pp. 109-52.

[18] See Frank O'Hare, Sentence Combining: Improving Student Writing without Formal Grammar Instruction (Urbana: NCTE, 1973).

[19] See Winterowd, Contemporary Rhetoric, especially pp. 90-91.